

APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1994
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

2 JULY 96

TITLE: Paper Mills and Fabrication

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VOLUME: 2 ISSUE: Winter YEAR: 1958

DECLASSIFIED AND RELEASED BY
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
SOURCE METHOD EXEMPTION 3B2B
NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT
DATE 2006

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PAPER MILLS AND FABRICATION

Stephen M. Arness

The paper mill and fabrication problem has appeared in many forms including outright fabrication, the sale of pseudo-intelligence, false confirmation, and multiple distribution of both valid and false information, as well as organized deception by foreign governments.

US intelligence agencies as well as all Free World intelligence agencies have been flooded with such information. It was estimated in 1952 that more than half of all the material received on several countries of greatest intelligence interest fell into these categories. US estimates were thus endangered and American intelligence efforts have been needlessly dissipated.

Multiple dissemination by paper mills operated by exiles from the Soviet Bloc cuts particularly deeply into the professional manpower resources of all agencies. Working independently of each other, American intelligence agencies were slow in developing a mechanism for benefiting methodically from their common experience in order to remedy this situation.

Paper mills are defined as intelligence sources whose chief aim is the maximum dissemination of their product. Their purpose is usually to promote special emigre-political causes while incidentally financing emigre-political organizations. The information thus conveyed consists of a mixture of valid information, overt material, propaganda, and fabrication. Its bulk, form, and obscure origin frequently preclude successful analysis and evaluation.

Fabricators are individuals or groups who, without genuine agent resources, invent their information or inflate it on the basis of overt news for personal gain or a political purpose.

The line between the two categories, in many cases, is difficult to draw.

Competent fabrication has defied recognition on the part of analysts and evaluators. Well-planned deception or provocation is apt to prove undetectable by analytical processes. It cannot be assumed, therefore, that more than a fraction of the number of actually existing cases in these categories have been identified. The established professional competence of the

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Soviet intelligence services coupled with their known preoccupation with deception and provocation — or, as they term it, "disinformation" — forcibly points up the danger which paper mills and fabricators represent to the US intelligence community.

This essay is primarily intended to call attention to the nature of this danger and to suggest the necessity of remedial action which may in time make the deception weapon less effective in the hands of the adversary and reduce his opportunity for employing it.

US intelligence-gathering agencies have spared neither manpower nor funds to close the gap between their information requirements and their knowledge of the Soviet Bloc. Groups of exiles from all target countries recognized very early that this situation offered them vast opportunities for political and personal advantage. Their intelligence representatives were well aware of the multiplicity of American agencies uncritically accepting all information offered, and even outbidding one another for intelligence sources. Moreover, their own experience often proved to them that American agencies did not fully coordinate their efforts, nor effectively cooperate to expose fraud.

Satellite politicians in exile knew that they could not return to power in their homelands except in the wake of war and Western victory. The liberal monetary remuneration offered by Western intelligence agencies for information from behind the Iron Curtain offered them a ready-made opportunity to remain alive and to preserve a political organization by peddling alleged intelligence. Careful operational analysis demonstrated that few, if any, emigre organizations had valid and unique intelligence assets; they lacked primarily the technical communications and documentation facilities for continuous contact with the homeland. Despite this, the unfortunate fiction persisted that such organizations had undefined special means of obtaining intelligence.

In many cases exile leaders neither understood nor respected the basic premise of US policy not to engage in war unless attacked. Their "intelligence" production, true, embroidered, or false, was inevitably used to influence US policy in the direction of hostility to the Soviet Bloc and to satisfy the ambitions of political pressure groups.

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To state the obvious: each exile group, as each sovereign country, used the weapons at its command in its self-interest, enlightened or otherwise. Emigre groups considered intelligence production a weapon to be so used. Yet the record of US dealings with them shows that in case after case it ignored the fact that the satisfaction of US intelligence needs was clearly secondary to their own political interests. One effect of the cry-wolf policy on the part of the emigres and the recognition of their efforts to mislead is that one of their reports may be ignored.

Immediately after the war, several exile groups had manpower assets behind the Iron Curtain. Hasty, uncoordinated, and totally insecure operational use of these assets by both emigre groups and Free World intelligence agencies permitted the Communist security services to identify and destroy or to use them. Initial failure in the West to recognize the ruthlessness and efficacy of the Soviet-type police state contributed to this process which, generally speaking, was completed by 1950.

In view of this, it became apparent that nothing could be achieved by further uncontrolled subsidies to exile groups. Assertion of operational control by US intelligence officers through financial or other means, it could be expected, would normally be resented and sabotaged by such groups as it would strike at the roots of their political purposes. Generally, it was found advisable not to deal exclusively with the political leadership, but to take advantage of dissidence within the groups and to make it plain that intelligence production on our terms was valued more highly than the leaders' political cooperation. The leaders, finding personal control of their groups effectively endangered, then were apt to come to terms.

This strategy was followed increasingly in those operations involving Satellite exile groups with which CIA had contact. However, unless all intelligence agencies also recognize these principles and effectively suppress extraneous, uncoordinated aid to these groups, the uncontrolled information-peddling pattern will certainly persist or recur.

The fact that substantial funds for intelligence procurement have been available to numerous agencies may actually be a handicap. Exile groups and individual intelligence peddlers

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assume that cost is no object to US intelligence personnel. Innumerable instances are on record in which payment for both good and bad information was wholly out of proportion to its true value. US financial liberality and competitive bidding among agencies has led to inflation in the intelligence market. Quality intelligence is seldom to be found in pieces of paper upon which a peddler has placed a price tag.

Virtually all outright fabrication cases can be attributed primarily to disregard for factors such as the following:

a. Control of agents should include their direct financial dependence upon the intelligence officers handling them.

b. Salaries of agents and sub-agents should be based upon sound estimates of actual living costs in indigenous terms, and exceed these only moderately. Excessive personal compensation, particularly when it is used to encourage volume of production, is a common cause of padding and fabrication.

c. A portion of the agents' earnings should be withheld in special blocked accounts until their services are satisfactorily completed.

d. Unless the use of funds available to agents for operational expenditures is closely controlled, security breaches or the purchase of embroidered and fabricated material will result.

e. Subsidies to foreign intelligence services and groups must be carefully watched to prevent financing by them of recognized paper mill operators and fabricators.

US intelligence agencies abroad have reacted in various ways to the problem of uncoordinated spending on intelligence procurement, provided they were aware of it. Local coordination on a varying scale has taken place spontaneously in some areas. In the past some CIA field stations, concentrating their available manpower on procuring good information, paid no attention to US competitors in the field; others treated the problem as one of counterespionage. For the most part, however, efforts have been made to establish the origin of all information from the area, regardless of the agency purchasing it. In some instances the attendant waste of professional manpower overseas has been prodigious. It is estimated, for example, that one-third of CIA's intelligence officers in Austria were committed during June 1951 to the detection and neutralization of fabricators and paper mills.

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The Communist concept of intelligence operations, patterned on the Soviet model, embraces a much broader field than does the Anglo-American. Far from being limited to seeking information through clandestine operations, it includes within the scope of "state security" a great variety of tasks designed to maintain the Communist Party in power and suppress all opposition. This means that all activity which can be construed as even critical of the state becomes a priority intelligence target.

The Communist security services accordingly make every effort to penetrate and control emigre movements abroad which may endanger their regime. This is not a difficult task. Emigre groups have operated openly in the West with little regard for security, and normally have admitted as members anyone who voices his anti-Communism strongly enough to be heard and who cannot be positively identified as a Communist agent. These two facts — that penetration and control of the opposition abroad are among the most important Soviet and Satellite intelligence tasks, and that they are so easily accomplished — lead to the assumption that emigre groups can keep only few secrets from the Soviet and Satellite governments, and that Soviet and Satellite agents may be high in the councils of such organizations.

There can be no reasonable doubt, furthermore, that Soviet and Satellite intelligence services have had the same easy access to the bulk of the emigre "intelligence" product as we do. It follows that Soviet intelligence analysts are apt to have a grasp of the extent of US information on the Soviet Bloc procured from such sources. They are thus able to base their deception planning on a thorough knowledge both of US intelligence procurement methods through exile groups and of much of the information in US hands against which deception is likely to be checked.

The lengths to which the Soviet Government will go in keeping track of emigre activities can best be illustrated by an historic case. During the nineteen twenties and thirties, in France, Soviet Intelligence obtained control of the Ligne Interieure, an "elite secret group" within the strongest Russian emigre organization of the day, the General Russian Military Union (ROVS). The Ligne Interieure had been designed by the ROVS for the centralization and political control of Rus-

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sian emigre groups, especially those of military usefulness. This aim naturally appealed to most White Russian emigres; however, since the Ligne Interieure was under Soviet control, it simultaneously served the purpose of making virtually the whole White Russian emigration subject to Soviet inspection and manipulation. In 1935 this Soviet control was exposed when the head of the Ligne Interieure, the Soviet agent General Skoblin, was discovered to have organized the kidnapping of General Yevgeni Miller, then head of the ROVS. His intention had been to replace Miller with a Soviet-controlled substitute. In subsequent investigations the background of the Soviet conspiracy outlined above was uncovered in detail.

These considerations should not lead to an automatic assumption that information received from emigre groups is planned Soviet deception or provocation. In most cases there is no substantial evidence that the originators of fabrication were, or are, agents of the Soviets, that the material has been supplied to them by Soviet intelligence, or that it constitutes Soviet deception. On the other hand, it is known that the Soviets are masters of deception and provocation and are willing to accept extraordinary sacrifices in terms of true information passed, in order to make deception stick at the proper moment. This leads to the conclusion that the Soviets may be using the present to digest their information and to develop potential deception channels and materials, reserving deception operations for moments and circumstances of their own choosing.

The theory that analysts in Washington are in a position to detect deception or fabrication rests on the assumption that they have verified material at hand against which they can measure their reports. Under the pressure of the volume of invalid material they must process, with little verified "control" material to go by, evaluators must rely on their personal skill and instinct. Their judgment is thus increasingly subject to human error. On the whole, analysis alone, whether on a high or low level in US intelligence, has been unable to break fabrication or deception cases except when the material lacked quality. Evaluators are handicapped not only by their ignorance of the operational circumstances under which the information is procured, but by the amount of processing and re-processing to which it is subjected before it reaches them. Translations,

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revisions, and summaries of spurious information frequently eliminate the flaws which might allow an analyst to detect a fraud in the original. It is the lesson of experience that fabrication and multiple false confirmation can be detected only by the method of operational investigation of the source and transmission channels, combined with reports analysis.

There can be no doubt that the Soviets are fully capable of planting information in our intelligence channels which has all the earmarks of being genuine. Only by careful scrutiny and cross-checking of the channels through which such deception material has been forwarded can the danger be reduced.

Unfortunately the following doctrines, which are fallacious and detrimental to the US intelligence effort, are still widespread among intelligence personnel:

- a. That intelligence agents of all nationalities are entitled to keep secret from their US intelligence officers the identities, antecedents, methods of operation, and means of access to information produced, of their subsources.
- b. That it is the mission of intelligence officers in the field to procure information without a determined attempt to ascertain its origin, leaving it to the experts in Washington to judge its validity.
- c. That overseas sources are in danger of compromise if identities are revealed to other agencies of the US Government which were established, trained, and equipped to protect such information properly.

The last mentioned concept fostered resistance among intelligence officers of various government agencies which prevented a long overdue exchange of information on fabricators and paper mills. As a result, an excessive amount of professional manpower had to be devoted to costly overseas investigation, where simple headquarters coordination of suspect sources would have revealed duplication or fraud.

The steady concentration of US intelligence agencies on military targets in the Soviet Bloc, and the relatively small influx after 1946 of knowledgeable new sources, have tended to solidify the intelligence market. Since 1946, in many areas, agencies of the Government have been dealing with identical intelligence sources. This makes a systematic program of centralized registration of sources both necessary and profitable.

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Editor's Note

The views developed in this paper were first expressed early in 1952 when the menace to the intelligence community presented by paper peddlers of various types was at its height.

Since then steps taken under the authority of the IAC give promise of achieving a coordinated solution to this problem by the US intelligence community.